

APRIL 1981

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

Meeting: 3rd April - "Victorian Native Fish"

Dr. Phillip Cadwallader

Meeting: 1st May - "Migratory Beekeeping" - Mr. G. Jamieson

Excursion: 5th April - Sunday - Full Day : Mt. Erip

Leader Dr. F. Harrap

Excursion: 3rd May - Sunday - Full Day : Linton - Leader Mr. P. Fry

GREY FANTAIL



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Meetings, as specified, are held in the Administration Building of the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street South, Ballarat, commencing 2 pm.

EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM CROCKERS, Cnr. STURT and ARMSTRONG STREETS, BALLARAT, AT 9.30 am FOR FULL DAY OUTINGS, OR AT 1.30 pm FOR HALF DAY.

NEW MEMBERS. Mr. & Mrs. Peter (& Helen) Mitchell and Mrs. Margaret Martin were elected as new members at the March meeting. We wish them a happy and rewarding association with our club.

MT. ERIP EXCURSION. Note that this is a full-day excursion on Sunday April 5th. As we will be walking through some long grass, rubber boots are advised if the day is wet. We will be lunching near the crossing so those coming for the afternoon only can meet us there.

DONALD HISTORY AND NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

W. V. F. N. C. A. CAMP-OUT AND ANNUAL MEETING OCTOBER 17th & 18th, 1981

ACCOMMODATION AVAILABLE

Motel Avon, Woods Street, Donald 3480. Phone 971 488 (8 units)
Shamrock Hotel, Woods Street, Donald. Phone 971 210
Mt. Jeffcott Hotel, Woods Street, Donald. Phone 971 011
Donald Hotel, Woods Street, Donald. Phone 971 410.
Caravan Park, Borung Highway, Donald. Phone, Shire Office 971 300.
or Caretaker (after hours) 971 562.

STD CODE .. 054

POSTCODE .. 3480

As accommodation is limited at all the above locations, early bookings are strongly advised.

PLEASE NOTE --- The weekend programme will commence at 1 p.m. on Saturday October 17th, and will conclude at approximately 4 p.m. on Sunday October 18th. More detailed information will be distributed among affiliated clubs later.

President -- Mrs. Keith Smith,
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MEMBERS' NIGHT

At our March meeting, members entertained with colour slides. Starting with the Mt. William camp-out we were delighted to relive the activities and view the scenery anew with close-ups of the wildflowers.

Next we viewed various mistletoes. Interesting, was the creeping one on a plum tree. The mistletoe has many varied hosts and has pear-shaped berries.

After viewing the growth of owllet nightjar chicks at the B.C.A.E. we were enchanted with the birds of the Lerderderg area and the Clunes swamps. Also the mallee fowl nest in the throes of construction at Wood Wood.

At the William Rickett's Sanctuary in the Dandenongs, sculptures blended in well with the landscape.

On to the Brisbane Ranges to view orchids and the sad aftermath of the cinnamon fungus.

Then to Mt. Beckworth, Nelson, Melba Gully, Port Campbell and the fossil cave at Naracoorte

Maria Island, just off the east coast of Tasmania had much to offer. From an old 1820 cottage to well-camouflaged eggs in a beach nest. After visiting the Derwent area we returned to Swan Island where we had spent an interesting and successful excursion to look for the orange-bellied parrot.

Closer to home we visited Infield Forest, Lake Goldsmith and Slaty Creek to admire anew the birds, orchids, spiders etc. A rainbow, lightning and the Wyperfield and Pink Lake sunsets were a fitting finale.

Our thanks go to Florence Chuk, Greg Binns, Ken Hammond, Florence Williamson, Frank Harrop, Lindsay Fink and Winifred Lade for sharing with us.

Jean Spicer.

MT. WIDDERIN LAVA CAVES

On a fine sunny afternoon 20 intrepid souls assembled to brave the dark and eerie passages to the netherworld.

Sounds a bit like the scenario for a T.V. thriller? Not a bit! It was the last club excursion to the Mt. Widderin Lava Caves.

While the leader placed a few lighted candles at strategic positions within the cave the party assembled at the entrance to get their eyes accustomed to the dark.

Armed with an assortment of lights, venturing into the cave the uneven, slippery floor soon claimed a couple of victims.

Exploring the main cave and ballroom several interesting features were noted -- patches of fungal mycelium on the floor and shining crystals on the roof.

Venturing further into the cave despite a wrong turning, plenty of hands, knees and booms-a-head and a couple of ups and downs, 18 of us managed to penetrate to the lake in the lowest cavern.

No boiling lava or brimstone - just a pool of crystal-clear water which, even in the driest years has not been known to go dry.

The water is pumped to the surface for irrigation use.

On arrival back at the entrance, all made good use of the gear provided by the guides to remove most of the traces of their adventure.

Lindsay Hink expressed the pleasure of all to the guides for such an interesting experience.

When leaving a "maintenance contribution" the thanks and appreciation of the club was extended to Mr. Notman for permission to explore the cave in his absence.

P. Fry.

Combined W. V. F. N. C. A. and V. F. N. C. A. Camp-out at Castlemaine.

Twelve Ballarat members attended this camp-out and enjoyed the programme that the Castlemaine Club had organized. There were many excursions from which to choose, including geological, historical, ornithological and botanical.

I shall make a few comments on the excursions I attended. In an area of grey, red and yellow box trees in the Muckleford Forest we looked at the small spider-flower, *Grevillea parviflora*, which could easily be mistaken, at a quick glance, for a *radiata* pine seedling.

Although I had traversed the Fryers Ridge area many years ago in the winter it was interesting to see it at another season.

We viewed an area which had been recently burnt and despite very little rain since the burn there was evidence of the resilience of the bushland. *Monotoca scoparia*, the Frickly Broom-heath, was thriving and covered in flowering buds.

This plant grows in our local bushland, but I have never seen such prolific shrubs. A fenced area clearly illustrated the effects the rabbits have on the environment. Some plants noticed in the fenced area were *Flatylobium formosum*, Handsome Flat-pea, in large patches, *Eriostemon verrucosus*, Fairy Wax-flower, *Leucopogon biflorus*, Twin-flower Beard-heath and *Helichysum scorpioides*, Curled Everlasting, which were noticeably absent outside the fence. Further along the ridge there was a small patch of dead twigs, indicating where a large grey-leaved wattle had been. This wattle has not been known to seed, but how did the first plant get there?

On inspection we found regeneration of three of the burnt shrubs. The experts say it is similar to Buchan Blue, a species as yet unnamed botanically.

I joined the Melbourne bus to Maldon. We inspected the Carmen Tunnel - a frustrating feat, as only 38 oz. gold were extracted, while nearby 310,000 oz. had been extracted. When the tunnel started six men took a week to cut two feet into the basalt. The rate increased as the cutting implements became more mechanical. A local historian gave us a comprehensive description of the mines and district.

We went to the top of Mt. Tarrengower and from here the extent of the fire which nearly destroyed Maldon could be seen.

Expedition Pass is where Major Mitchell passed through the hills. The dam is open to duck shooters - a few coots and three ducks were seen and many small birds were seen in the eucalypts and acacias. The rain sent us back to our cars. No one complained of the rain during such a dry season.

At the Saturday evening meeting Cliff Besuglehole's latest book on the plants of the Alpine area was launched. These are for sale at \$5.00 each. The launching of this book was the reason for the combined W.V.F.N.C.A. and V.F.N.C.A. week-end.

The Castlemaine Club members showed slides on Sunday evening following the V.F.N.C.A. Annual Meeting. Slides were of areas we had seen on our excursions and other points of interest in the district. Mr. Ern Perkins finished by encouraging us with our home gardens by showing his blending of exotic and native plants.

Thanks go to the Castlemaine Club members for organizing and hosting this very successful week-end.

H. Burgess.

Excursion to Mt. Alexander.

We spent an enjoyable afternoon visiting a number of interesting spots. Our first stop was the ruins of an old building associated with a silkworm industry started in the 1870's. The building was in a pine plantation, but there were two samples of necklace ferns growing out of ledges in the building.

From here we drove to the koala park. We saw very few koalas (no one saw more than four), a pure stand of manna gums and quite a few black wattles.

Other short visits were to the Dog Rocks (large granite boulders), the granite tower and Lang's lookout near the T.V. towers on Mt. Alexander.

Our final stop was at an oak forest. It was planted there many years ago to supply oak bark for the local tanners, before they realized that wattle bark did the job just as well.

Excursion to Expedition Pass

On Monday morning we were taken to Expedition Pass for a repeat excursion. Our leader gave us a list of 53 species of birds found by the previous group. We were able to manage only 18. Quite a large group of red-browed finch kept about 20 metres in front of us for a while. We had wandered for about one kilometre around the reservoir and were about to turn back when we were caught by a sudden downpour of rain. This dampened our enthusiasm as well as our bodies and everyone headed for their cars as quickly as possible to drive back to Castlemaine to dry off and change.

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists deserve congratulations for the time and effort which went into the preparation and leadership of excursions and night programmes.

G. Hocking.

Leadbeater's Possum

An extract from the C.C.V. newsletter, February 1981. Leadbeater's possum lives in the Central Highlands of Victoria, in tall open forests of Mountain ash, Alpine ash and Shining gum. Its habitat requirements include an abundance of large old hollow trees for nest sites and a dense tangled understorey dominated by acacias which are used for feeding. Much of the 95,370 ha. of ash forest in the Central Highlands is not suitable for Leadbeater's possum since it is young regrowth from the 1939 bushfires or from logging activities. The total area of older (pre 1939) forest is only about 5,000 ha. This is the potential Leadbeater's possum habitat and will have to form the nucleus for any reserve to protect the species. At present most of the area is available to the forestry industry for both sawlogs and woodchips, so the species must be considered to be endangered. Victorian laws do not protect endangered wildlife from extinction. Anyone caught in possession of an endangered bird or animal faces a \$5,000 fine, but it is not illegal to deprive those same creatures of their habitat.

